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General debate on national experience in population matters: fertility, reproductive health and development

Statement submitted by the International Women's Health Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. Soon, the world's population will reach 7 billion. We are now living in an era where we have the largest generations ever of young people under the age of 19 — amounting to 2.5 billion. As these children and adolescents grow up, start engaging in sexual activity, and face the risks of unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and complications during pregnancy and childbirth, demographic momentum will play a significant role. This requires urgent attention by the international community to ensure that adolescents have education on sexual and reproductive rights and health, information, access to comprehensive services and supplies, and human rights protections.

2. Governments have a clear obligation to promote and protect the right of all individuals to decide freely on all matters relating to their sexuality and reproduction, including the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so. Fulfilment of the right to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, free of violence, discrimination, and coercion, requires that women and young people have access to the full range of contraceptive choices, including male and female condoms, as well as comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, based on full and informed consent.

3. Three key actions are necessary to achieve reproductive health, fertility and development:

(a) Make universally available comprehensive reproductive health services, which include family planning; skilled care during pregnancy and delivery and postpartum; access to safe abortion; and prevention, care, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV;

(b) Strengthen health systems to ensure equitable access to these services and provide health information and comprehensive sexuality education, particularly for the largest-ever generations of adolescents;

(c) Invest in policies and programmes, and legislative and judiciary actions, that give women and girls access to economic resources, skills training, and social support and that protect their human right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.

4. Only healthy women whose human rights are protected can be fully productive workers and effective participants in their country's political processes. Only fully informed and empowered adolescents can make responsible choices as they enter into relationships and begin their sexual and reproductive lives. Development and poverty eradication strategies work when universal access to sexual and reproductive health and protection of human rights are achieved.

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* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.